

(Washington, D.C.) – U.S. Rep. Rush Holt (NJ-12) today announced that the U.S. House of Representatives has passed the 2012 Department of Defense Appropriations Act, a bill that reflects his actions to prevent military suicides and to protect the commissary at Fort Monmouth.

Included in the bill is an amendment that Holt wrote to set aside \$20 million to prevent suicide among U.S. soldiers and reservists. The funding will support programs comparable to those proposed in the Sgt. Coleman S. Bean Individual Ready Reserve Suicide Prevention Act, a bill that Holt introduced in honor of a New Jersey veteran who took his own life in 2008 after two tours of duty in Iraq.

“Over the last two years, more U.S. soldiers have died by their own hands than in combat,” Holt said. “This funding will help to convey a critical message to America’s soldiers: You are not alone. If you have suffered such trauma in service to this country that you are considering suicide, America stands ready to help you.”

During debate on the Defense Appropriations Act, Holt also spoke on the House floor about the need to protect the commissary at Fort Monmouth, which is scheduled to close in September as part of the federal Base Realignment and Closure process. Holt secured commitments from Rep. Bill Young (R-FL), the chairman of the U.S. House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense, and Rep. Norman Dicks (D-WA), the ranking member of that subcommittee, to work to keep the commissary open for two additional years.

“The potential closure of Fort Monmouth’s commissary has caused deep and understandable concern among the 19,000 troops, reservists, and retirees who depend on the facility,” Holt said. “I am hopeful that, now that senior Congressional leaders have joined the Secretary of the Army in opposing the commissary’s closure, the Pentagon will choose to keep it open for two more years.”

Although Holt wrote the suicide prevention provision and worked to support Fort Monmouth throughout the appropriations process, he ultimately voted against the underlying bill after the House repeatedly voted down amendments to cut wasteful spending.

“The U.S. spends nearly as much on its military as the rest of the world combined,” Holt said. “Much of that money is wasted on Cold War legacy programs better suited to defeating Nikita Khrushchev than to keeping America safe today. I repeatedly attempted to refocus defense spending on modern threats, yet the House rejected every effort to end wasteful spending. At a time when the president and Congress are negotiating trillions of dollars in spending cuts – including cuts to programs for the poor, the elderly, and the disabled – I could not support legislation that expands the Pentagon’s budget by \$17 billion.”

Holt added, “Although the underlying bill includes irresponsible spending, I appreciate my colleagues’ support for my efforts to prevent military suicides and protect Fort Monmouth’s commissary. I hope that, as this bill advances through the legislative process, the Senate will preserve what is good, strike what is bad, and produce a defense spending bill that will do far more to keep America safe.”

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